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Pronunciation and Orthography

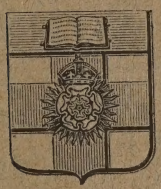
OF THE

Chindau Language.

BY

DANIEL JONES, M.A.,

Lecturer on Phonetics at University College, London.



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INTRODUCTION.

The object of the present paper is to record in outline the pronunciation of the native African language known as Chindau, and incidentally to show how readily the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association may be used as a current system of writing languages which have hitherto never been written down, or which have at present no fixed orthography.

The results here presented have been obtained by an analysis of the pronunciation of a native, Mr. Simbini Nkomo, made by me on the suggestion and with the kind assistance of Dr. W. L. Thompson, of Mount Silinda, Rhodesia, in September, 1910. Dr. Thompson and Mr. Nkomo were in London for a few days only, and should any inaccuracies be detected, they must be attributed to the shortness of the time at our disposal. I believe, however, that the work is substantially correct, and that the errors, if any, are insignificant.

DANIEL JONES.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,
March, 1911.

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THE PRONUNCIATION AND ORTHOGRAPHY OF THE CHINDAU LANGUAGE.

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1. The Chindau language is one of the Bantu group, and is spoken in a part of South East Africa, lying to the west of Sofala.

2. The speech sounds of this language may be represented by means of the usual International Phonetic symbols with the addition of two consonant symbols for sounds not occurring in European languages. The symbols **ʊ** and **ɋ** here used for these sounds have been chosen arbitrarily and have no claim to special merit. Dr. Thompson suggests the use of the figures **6** and **8**, which would have the advantage of not necessitating new types.[1]

3. The language contains five vowel sounds,[2] which may be represented by the letters **i**, **e**, **a**, **o**, and **u** respectively, and 27 consonant sounds, which may be represented by the letters **p**, **b**, **t**, **d**, **c**, **ɟ**, **k**, **g**, **m**, **n**, **ɲ**, **ŋ**, **r**, **f**, **v**, **ʋ**, **w**, **ʊ**, **ɋ**, **s**, **z**, **ʃ**, **ʒ**, **j**, **x**, **ɣ**, and **h**. In addition there are several consonant groups the elements of which are so closely connected that the groups

[1] In any case the symbols for these sounds should be arbitrary ; the use of diagraphs (such as *sw*, *zw*) advocated by some must necessarily be misleading to Europeans and incomprehensible to natives.

[2] Subject to slight variations of quality, see § 7.

might almost be considered as simple sounds; the principal are **pf**, **bv**, **ts**, **dz**, **tʊ**, **dʊ**, to which should perhaps be added **tʃ**, **dʒ** (see §§ 11, 12).

4. The approximate values of most of the letters will be seen from the following table. Further details regarding the values of the various sounds are given in §§ 6-20.

	Symbol of Chindau sound.	Nearest English equivalent.
Vowels.	**i**	the sound of *i* in *machine*.
	e	,, *e* in *get*.
	a	,, *a* in *calm*.
	o	,, *aw* in *saw* (this is only a very rough approximation, see § 6).
	u	,, *u* in *rule*.
Consonants.	**c**	the sound of *ch* in *choose* (see, however, § 11).
	ɟ	,, *j* in *joy* (see, however, § 12).
	ɲ	,, *ni* in *onion* (see, however, § 14).
	ŋ	,, *ng* in *sing*.
	ʋ	(no equivalent, see § 17).
	ʊ	(no equivalent, see § 18).
	ʛ	(no equivalent, see § 19).
	ʃ	the sound of *sh* in *ship*.
	ʒ	,, *s* in *measure*.
	j	,, *y* in *yes*.
	x	,, *ch* in Scotch *loch*.
	ɣ	(no equivalent, see § 20).
	The remaining symbols **p**, **b**, **t**, **d**, **k**, **g** (hard), **m**, **n**, **r**, **f**, **v**, **s**, **z**, **w** and **h** have their ordinary values.	

5. The sounds may be arranged in a table according to their mode of formation as follows:—

		Labial.		Dental.	Palatal.	Velar.	Glottal.
		Bilabial.	Labiodental.				
Consonants.	Plosive	p b	...	t d	c ɟ	k g	...
	Nasal	m	...	n	ɲ	ŋ	...
	Rolled	...	...	r	...	...	...
	Fricative	ʋ w, ʊ̯	f v	ʊ̯, sz, ʃ ʒ	j	x ɣ w	h
					Front.	Back.	
Vowels.	High	u	...	...	i	u	...
	Mid	o	...	...	e	o	...
	Low	...	...	...	a		...

(Sounds occurring twice on the chart have a double articulation.)

6. The following are some details regarding the various sounds.

I.—Vowels.

i is very similar to the sound of *i* in *machine*, but has a slight tendency towards the sound of the French *é*.

a is much the same as the vowel in the English *calm*, but has a slight tendency towards the "front" sound heard in the French *la*.[1]

o is intermediate in quality between the English vowels in *so* and *saw*. It is a pure vowel, not diphthongized like the English vowel in *so*.

u is very similar to the sound of *u* in *rule*, but has a slight tendency towards the sound of French *o* (as in *gros*).

7. The quality of the vowels **i**, **e**, **a**, and **o** is noticeably influenced by the stress. The values indicated above are the

[1] The usual vowel in *calm* is called a "back" vowel because the tongue is somewhat drawn back in forming it. The French vowel in *la* has a clearer sound and is formed with the tongue further forward.

normal values in stressed syllables. In unstressed syllables **i** becomes very lax (like the second vowel in *pity*), **e** tends towards the sound of French *é*, **a** tends towards the English sound of *u* in *much*, **o** tends towards the French sound of *o* in *gros*.

8. Vowels at the ends of words are very short and are often completely devocalized ("whispered"), as in Portuguese, or disappear altogether.

9. Vowels are generally nasalized when a nasal consonant precedes; thus **murumbgana** (son) would be in "narrow" or minutely accurate transcription **mũrumbga:nã**.[1]

II.—Consonants.

10. **p**, **t** and **k** when followed by vowels are pronounced as in French, that is, without aspiration. When not pronounced strongly, as is often the case, they are apt to sound to an English ear rather like **b**, **d** and **g**.

11. **c** is the "palatal plosive" consonant, *i.e.*, a sound intermediate in tongue position between **k** and **t**. The sound does not occur in English, but may often be observed in dialectal French in such words as *quai*, *quinze*.[2] Unlike **p**, **t** and **k**, it is strongly aspirated before vowels in Chindau. Its quality appears to vary between a pure **c** and the consonant group **tʃ** (the usual pronunciation of *ch* in English).[3]

[1] **:** is the symbol of length; **~** is the mark of nasalization.

[2] The sound is a difficult one for those who are not accustomed to it. A near approximation to it may be attained by trying to pronounce the group of sounds **tj** (as in *tube*) with the tip of the tongue pressed firmly against the lower teeth.

[3] It is open to question whether these Chindau sounds should be represented in current writing by the single letters **c**, **ɟ** or by the groups **tʃ**, **dʒ**. Most missionaries prefer to regard the sounds as single sounds, but it should be pointed out that if the pronunciations **tʃ**, **dʒ** are sufficiently common to admit the posssibility of adopting the symbols **tʃ**, **dʒ** as the permanent spelling, there would be a saving of two symbols —an important consideration from the point of view of missionary work.

12. ɟ is the corresponding voiced sound, that is to say it is the sound which differs from **c** in the same way as **b** differs from **p**. Its quality appears to vary between a pure ɟ and the consonant group **dʒ** (the usual sound of *j* in English).[1]

13. The group **mw** is generally accompanied by a click of the lips (practically the sound of a kiss). This indicates that in pronouncing the **m** there is a simultaneous ŋ formation, which is not released till after the separation of the lips. It does not appear necessary to indicate this click by any symbol because it is always incidental to the group **mw** and does not occur under any other circumstances.

14. ɲ is, strictly speaking, not the double sound heard in the English *onion*, but the somewhat similar single sound heard in the standard French pronunciation of *agneau*, *vigne*, etc.

15. There is no *l* sound in the language.

16. **r** is sometimes strongly rolled, sometimes only semi-rolled (that is, formed by one single tap of the tongue) and sometimes fricative. The three forms seem to be used indifferently.

17. ʋ is the "bilabial *v*" often heard in German as the pronunciation of the letter *w* (especially in such words as *Schwester*, *zwei*), also heard in Spanish as the pronunciation of intervocalic *b* (as in *saber*).

18. ʊ is a "breathed dental fricative" with strong simultaneous lip rounding. A near approach to it may be attained by pronouncing the English sound of *th* in *thin* with the lips rounded as for **w**. The exact sound may be arrived at by pronouncing the French consonantal sound of *u* (as in *puis*), "devocalized" and with the tip of the tongue simultaneously raised into the position of the English sound of *th* in *thin*.

[1] See note 3 on previous page.

19. **ɡ** is the corresponding voiced sound, that is to say, it is the sound which differs from **σ** in the same way as **v** differs from **f**.

20. **ɣ** is the voiced sound corresponding to the breathed sound **x** (the sound of *ch* in the Scotch *loch*). The sound **ɣ** is often heard in German instead of **ɡ** between two vowels (as in *Wagen*). It is also the usual pronunciation of *g* between two vowels in Spanish (as in *luego*).

21. Nasal consonants often occur in Chindau in positions which seem peculiar to Europeans. Examples: **ŋombe** (cow), **ciŋaŋaŋa** (the name of an animal), **ndherera** (one who has lost all his relations and friends), **mvo** (hippopotamus).

III.—Length.

22. Vowels appear to be generally long in penultimate syllables when stressed (for instance, the **o**'s in **cibode, tsoŋga,** the **i** in **darika,** the first **i** in **murindi,** the first **a** in **ŋgwara**); otherwise they are short. In a simple system of transcription such as would be required for a fixed orthography of the language it does not appear necessary to mark the length.

IV.—Stress.

23. The stress is normally on the penultimate syllable of long words, but in rapid speech there sometimes seems to be a rhythmical stress on other syllables. This was noticeable in Mr. Nkomo's pronunciation of the words **coani, piŋgura** in the text, where there was a distinct stress on the first syllables when the sentences were pronounced rapidly.

---

24. The following are examples of the most important sounds and groups of sounds not occurring in English:—

c. **cibode** (turtle) (also pronounced **tʃibode**).

ʒ. **ʒira** (cloth) (also pronounced **dʒira**), **ɲʒira** (path) (also pronounced **ndʒira** or **nʒira**).

ɲ. **ɲamuʃi** (to-day).

ʋ. **kuʋaʋa** (bitter), **kuʋaʋira** (to burn, said of burning the grass round a hut).

σ. **σipa** (black).

ɠ. **ɠiro ɠeʃe** (all things, literally "things all").

x. **kotxa** (fear), **kotxisa** (to frighten).

ɡ. **imbɡa** (dog), **murumbɡana** (son), **jizɡwai** (hear ye).

ts. **tsoŋga** (small).

tσ. **itσa** (new).

dɠ. **dede idɠa** (a new baboon).

---

25. *Text.*

nzou ne cibode.

nzou iaka ʃoŋgana ne cibode. "coani, sekuru, mnoenda kuri." "ndi nohambahamba haŋu, kwone ɲika," kwaka piŋgura nzou. "waka tsoŋga, mzaia." "ndaka tsoŋga? au zi ere kuti ndi ŋga kudarika?" "m m." "uja maŋgwani uone." "ɠakanaka," kwaka piŋgura nzou, "ŋgerimwe zua, cibode." ca katsha[1] marindi maʋiri. coco enda kodaidza cimweni. caka ci potedza murindi. ci kati kweciri: "gara muno; ndi noenda gogara murindi rimweni. nzou inoguma pano ɲamuʃi. nda kati kweiri, ndi ŋga idarika. ika pika. ndi nozoti, ndo darika; u zoti, nda darika. u bude. u ti wo, ndo darika. ndi nozoti, nda darika. ndi nozowuda wo[2]. nzou iaka ɲisɠwa ŋge cibode.

ndaa ino inoti dzidzisa kuti, cibóde caka ŋgwara kune nzou.

[1] Or **katsa.** [2] Or **nozowuda o.**

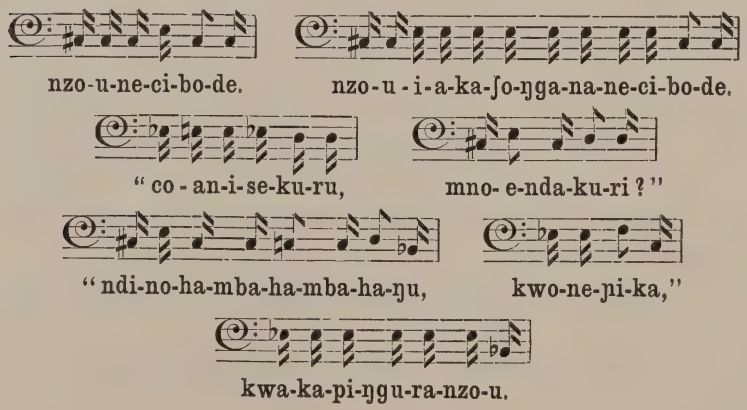
26. *Literal Translation.*

Elephant and Turtle.

Elephant he met with turtle. "Greeting, uncle, are-you-going where?" "I am-roaming I, to-see world" (particle) answered elephant. "You small (= You are too small), cousin." "I small? Do-not-you know that (particle) I can you-jump-over?" "No, no." "You-come tomorrow to-see." "All-right" (particle) answered elephant, "another-day (particle), turtle." It dug holes two. It went to-call another. It it put in-the-hole. It said to-it: "Stay here. I will-go stay in-the-hole another (= in the other hole). Elephant will-come here to-day. I said to-it, I can jump-over-it. It denied. I will say, I jump: you will-say, I have jumped; you will-come-out; you will-say also, I jump; I will say, I have jumped; I will-come-out also." Elephant was beaten by turtle.

Story this it teaches this, turtle is clever more elephant (= is cleverer than the elephant).

27. It may be of interest to mention that the intonation of the language is somewhat different from that which we are accustomed to in Europe. The following is Mr. Nkomo's intonation of the first few sentences recorded by means of an approximate musical notation.



28. A notable feature of the Chindau intonation is the frequent use of level or very slightly rising intonation at the ends of sentences. The lowest part of the voice hardly ever seems to be used, the language affording in this respect a striking contrast to the European languages.

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29. I would add a summary of the reasons why the International Phonetic alphabet is to be recommended in preference to any other alphabet as a uniform system of writing languages hitherto unwritten.

(1). It is scientifically constructed on the "one sound one symbol" principle; it is therefore a system which is at once easier for natives to learn, and more helpful to Europeans in acquiring the pronunciation of native languages, than any sytem which departs from this principle.

(2). It is not the pet system of any one individual; it was constructed over 20 years ago by representatives of a number of European languages.

(3). It is intended to be international, that is to say, not specially chosen to meet the requirements of any particular language but designed for universal use.

(4). It is already in far greater general use than any other system. It is employed in several hundred books dealing with the pronunciation of English, French, German and numerous other languages, while those who use it in connexion with the teaching of pronunciation are probably to be numbered by thousands.[1] Missionaries and others have therefore abundant facilities for learning it; and natives desirous of acquiring a correct pronunciation of English, French or German would

[1] The writer will gladly furnish particulars of the system and a list of the principal books in which it is used to anyone interested.

have the great advantage of being able to use the best text-books on the pronunciation of these languages without having to learn a new phonetic alphabet.

(5). Any missionary or other person engaged in writing down a native language could in cases of difficulty (*e.g.*, as regards the best mode of representing some new sound) consult the Council of the International Phonetic Association. By referring points of difficulty to this committee of specialists, uniformity would be ensured.

APPENDIX.

Specimen of the Thonga Language.

By the kindness of Prof. Paul Passy, Professor of Phonetics at the École des Hautes Études, Paris, I am able to add a specimen of another South African language, namely, that known as Thonga (Gwamba dialect), written in International Phonetic symbols. This text was taken down by Prof. Passy from the dictation of the missionary, M. Châtelain, who speaks the language extremely well.

The following are explanations of the symbols occurring here which have not already been explained in connexion with the Chindau language.

s̀ is a "palatalized" **s**, that is, a variety of **s** produced with simultaneous raising of the main part of the tongue in the direction of the hard palate. The sound has the effect of **s** and **j** (the sound of *y* in *yes*) pronounced simultaneously.

ż is the corresponding voiced sound.

l̥ is a "devocalized" **l**; it is the sound of Welsh *ll*, and is generally used in French in such words as *peuple* when final.

ʍ is a "devocalized" **w**; many English speakers pronounce *wh* with this sound.

Two varieties of **e** have to be distinguished. They are represented by the symbols **e** and **ɛ**, and their sounds are similar to those of the French *é* and *è* respectively.

Similarly, two varieties of **o** have to be distinguished. They are represented by the symbols **o** and **ɔ**. **o** is the vowel sound heard in the French word *gros*, and **ɔ** is the vowel in the English *not*.

Note.—There would be no objection for purposes of current writing to replacing the symbol **ʊ** by the symbol **v**, the labio-dental sound not occurring independently in the Thonga language.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (St. Luke, Ch. 15, v. 11–24).

v. 11. munhu uŋwana a a re ni ʋana ʋa ʋanuna ʋambiri; lo wa ndżisana a ku ka tata wa jɛna, "tatana, ndżi aʋɛle ʃuma lɛʃi ŋga ta ʋa ʃa mina". — kutani tata wa ʋona a ʋa aʋanjisɛla ʃuma ʃa jɛna.

v. 13. kute lɔko ku hundżile masiku ma ŋga re maŋgani, ŋwana wa jɛna lɔwa ndżisana lɔko a l̥ɛŋgɛlɛtile hikwaσo, a rurɛla a tikwen lɛri ŋge kule; a haŋgalasa ʃuma ʃa jɛna hi ʋusɔpfa. lɔko a djile hikwaσo, ku wa ndlala lɛjikulu e tikwen rɛro, masuku a suŋgula ku pfumala. kutani a ja tṡhama ni munhu wa tiko rɛro; jɔlɔji a ŋwi ruma e masiŋwin ja jɛna ku risa makhumba. kutani a naʋɛla ku ʃura hi makamba laja djiwaka hi makhumba, kambe a ŋga njikiwaŋga ntʃhumu hi munhu.

v. 17. masuku ku ʋa laha a tiɛl̥ɛkɛtaka, a ku, "malandża lajo tala σo ŋgasi ja kɔna e ka tatana, ja ni ʋuσa lɛbjo tala; kasi mina halɛnu, ndżi fa hi ndlala! — ndżi ta pfuka, ndżi ja ka tatana, ndżi ta ku ka jɛna, 'tatana, ndżi djɔhɛle tilo na wɛna, a σi ndżi fanɛri ku tshama ndżi ʋuriwa ŋwana wa wɛna; u ndżi ɛndla kukɔta uŋwana wa malandża ja wɛna'". — masuku a pfuka, a ja ka tata wa jɛna.

v. 20. kaku lɔko a ha re kule, tata wa jɛna a ŋwi ʋona, a ŋwi twɛla ʋusiwana; kutani a tṡutṡuma, a wɛla nhaŋwin ja jɛna, a ŋwi ntσontσa. kutani ŋwana a ku ka jɛna, "tatana, ndżi djɔhɛle tilo na wɛna, a σi ndżi fanɛri ku tṡhama ndżi ʋuriwa ŋwana wa wɛna". — kambe tata wa jɛna a ku ka malandża ja jɛna, "tisane ŋguʋu lɛjo sasɛka ŋgopfu, mi ŋwi ambɛʃa jɔna, mi ŋwi ŋgɛnisa ʃiŋgwaʋila e ritiᴍen, ni tintaŋgu a milɛŋgen. tisane rɔle lɛri nɔnɛke, mi ri tl̥aʋa; hi dja, hi tṡaka; hekuʋa ŋwana lɔji wa mina a a file, kutani o hanjile; a a lal̥ɛkile, kambe o kumiʋile". — masuku ʋa suŋgula ku tṡaka.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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